

Exhibition Text for Mirko Lazović
While Staring at...
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Looking down from a height, surveying the topology of relations we have with ourselves, with others, and with machines is Lazović's enduring fascination. Our engagement with the works is never a demand but the invitation to look more deeply – into the well – is always at hand. “While Staring at...” is a strong example of a self-sufficient work in the sense that the presence of a viewer will not change its function as an intermediary between two machines. Other related works, like “Narcissus” and “Liquid Light,” adapt and react to presence. Lazović alternates hiding and revealing his working methods in order to unfold layers of entry and interpretation. With “While Staring at...,” the program designed to scan visual components of architectural facades to produce musical scores, Lazović has decided to display the processing in real time, exposing its workings, and revealing the archetypal man behind the curtain. He is, at the same time, setting up site and audience-specific relationships.

“While Staring at...” offers a striking compositional method, programmed to function as a conversation between machines. We can find numerous examples of Lazović's particular form of production and interest in the hand-built. Initially inspired by Vienna's basalt-grey MuMoK facade, Lazović wondered how the building might be read as a score. His curiosity about how the building would sound recalls the compositions of American composer Alvin Lucier, who sought the acoustic signature of interior architectural spaces. Lazović's compositional method is an exciting divergence, as he works with the exterior, uncontained space. This too, can be considered as an abstraction of the concept of exterior space because the *space* becomes isolated as a 2D image: flat visual data. Combinations of shapes, colors and gradations of the building are registered and assigned tones so that the program scans and reads the image of the building as a score. Lucier's description of the way that a performance of his composition “Vespers” sounded, “as if one were taking a slow sound photograph over a long period of time,” closely resembles Lazović's new compositional method in reverse – beginning with the photograph and from there, generating the sound. Furthermore, this practice is site-specific, and establishes a strong relationship between the buildings of a specific city and the place where they are performed: the MuMoK facade can be heard in Vienna, an apartment building in Belgrade can be heard in Belgrade, and so on. Any building can be interpreted by the program and heard, but the decision to “play the place” is based on where it will be shown.

Yet another mode of relations, “Liquid Light” invites viewers to unveil the workings together, facilitating play and a sense of responsibility to each other and future viewers. Glitches are intentionally programmed into the work “Liquid Light” so that it will share some human characteristics: it will be overwhelmed and fail or slow down when it is over stimulated or excessively used. Like the craftsperson's individualized measurements, specific to the hand and irreproducible, personal traces are unobtrusively present in the software Lazović has written. Just as an artist drawing with an ink-saturated brush will at a certain point begin to make the last imperfect marks as the ink supply is depleted, and call attention to his presence, Lazović celebrates the human trace in his particular method of software development. He works intuitively, not expecting a specific outcome but finding it in the process. The handmade is not usually associated with programming, but it figures prominently in these works, from the simple, imperfect and raw materials he has chosen for the construction of “Narcissus,” to the use of water and analog mechanical devices used in “Liquid Light”. Here also, Lazović's interest in the musicality of the hand-built is apparent. “Liquid Light” flows across the floor space in the form of a rectangular shallow pool, suggesting that the entire work is a slice of something much larger and longer, like train tracks, or perhaps, a river. It is a sample of something indefinite, or, in the words of French designer and theorist Bernard Cache, a “cut” in the sense of a sample and as isolation-abstraction. Lazović has designed the installation so that the presence of bodies will activate undulating colored patterns and rhythmic mechanical sounds that resonate throughout the interior. The aspect of spatial positioning, if recognized, becomes a collaborative creative process when more than one person is near the work. Bodies begin to relate to one another and to the work, composing together in light and sound, as presences.

Another work, complimentary to and developed concurrently with “While Staring at...” is Lazović's sculptural installation, “Narcissus.” The first personal encounter with “Narcissus” involves looking down at gently distorted visages in a shallow pool where drops of water seem to be falling, making concentric circles on the mirror below.

Gazing at our own puzzled faces, we confront the impossibility of what we think we see. It appears that there is no source from which the water falls. Against nature, the drops come from *below*, reformulating conventions of everyday physics. “Narcissus” lets us look down at ourselves, as prospectors. We mine the image for deeper meaning, and are seduced by it, but we do not face the same tragic consequences as our protagonist in the original Greek myth. We are not permitted to look at an undisturbed image, and are thus not able to authorize our own image and admire it, nor are we authoritatively “looking down” at ourselves critically. The expression, to look down on ourselves, no longer assumes a dangerous or derogatory connotation. Rather, we are given a space to reframe the experience and the relation, and this is at the heart of Mirko Lazović's work.

Finally, Lazović rejects the false binary of cold machine/warm human, arguing instead for a heightened appreciation of presence, tenable in any of the three models he has produced here. His interest in the subjective/objective experience defies the predictable positioning of man and machine, or even man and man, and instead shifts the perspective from a parallel view comparing oppositions to one that elegantly weaves together various relational, perceptual and compositional possibilities.

Bernard Cache, [Earth Moves](#)

Alvin Lucier, [Music 109: Notes on Experimental Music](#)